



How to get along with people

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We all know how it feels to 'get along with people', but what is really happening at these times? What are the ingredients of the secret sociable sauce?

It is clear that some people are more offensive than others. It seems that either they don't care or they don't know what they are doing.

If you have problems getting along with people there are three possible reasons why:

1. You know how you are upsetting people but you don't care
2. You don't know you are upsetting people
3. You are aware that you are upsetting people but you don't quite understand why.
This article is for the benefit of all you 3's out there! (And possibly some 2's too!)

Why people get offended

"I feel put down, put out, misunderstood, threatened, ignored, cheated and deeply offended." Well not really, but I could - why? Because I am human and therefore have basic emotional needs that can be transgressed by other human beings.

We all have basic emotional needs, and to feel happy your needs have to be met at least some of the time.

Emotional needs include:

- The need for safety and security
- The need to give and receive attention
- The need for a sense of status
- The need for purpose and goals
- The need for physical wellbeing
- The need for a connection to something greater than ourselves - community, ideals, beliefs etc.
- The need for intimacy
- The need to be stimulated and stretched (but not stressed)
- The need for a sense of control.

So how can you offend people?

You offend people by stepping on their basic emotional needs.

One common way this occurs is by mistakenly assuming that communicating the problem 'as you see it' is the only thing to be considered when 'giving feedback.' Anyone can say the

words, but it takes thought, practice and skill to deliver unpalatable messages without causing undue hurt.

Of course, there are situations in which the message is more important than the method. If I'm administering mouth to mouth resuscitation to someone I may yell at a friend or colleague for assistance. Yelling at them normally (in a non-emergency) would infringe upon their needs for:

- Status
- Safety and security
- The need for a sense of control

"But as long as they get the message who cares?" Well, that depends whether you want to get along with people; on whether you consider friendship and the morale of those around you important or not...

Emotional needs in relationships

If you have upset someone, consider which of their emotional needs you have trampled upon.

If you complain to a member of staff loudly in front of other staff members then they may feel 'put down' (impairment to their sense of status). This would hold true for a teenager in front of their friends.

If you end a four year romance by text message the recipient of your insensitivity may feel angered to receive such news in this way. Why? Because many needs are trampled on:

1. The need for status (as respected partner, OK, ex-partner)
2. The need for proper attention
3. The need for a sense of control (you try reasoning with a text message!)
4. The need for intimacy... and so the list goes on.

How to spot which emotional need you have infringed

Of course you may not mean to upset someone but if you do, it will be because some basic need hasn't been catered for. Here are a few more examples:

'You're just not hearing me!' (the need for attention, intimacy, connection to others,).

'I never know where I am with you!' (the need for safety and security).

'You should have asked me first!' (need for status).

'You shouldn't have lied to me!' (The need for safety and security, status, intimacy).

'You're really dissing me!' (The need for status).

Over-sensitivity

Some people will take offence at almost anything. However, if you are clear about why people get upset then at least you'll know why they feel upset, which will tell you something about what is important to them and illuminate their more sensitive areas.

As I've said, it's not always appropriate to consider someone else's feelings. If you are performing life-saving first aid you may have to scream at people to get out of the way. However, once you are clear about emotional needs then you can begin to understand what goes wrong in relationships.

How to Make Friends

When making friends, understanding how emotional needs work is essential.

Different friends usually meet different needs in your life.

- You may make a friend who is fun and exciting but who you wouldn't necessarily tell your deepest secrets. They meet your need for stimulation.
- Another friend may be less exciting, more plodding but a wonderful listener.
- Another may be someone you can share intimacies with who makes you feel safe and secure because they are so dependable.
- Yet another may be a business partner, someone you can share goals and aspirations with, meeting your needs for goals, status, and meaning.
- And that one person who meets all or many of your needs? Hey presto, it's your perfect friend or partner!

What makes a good friend?

People will tend to want to make friends with you if they feel you meet some of their emotional needs. If you make them laugh you stimulate. If you look out for them they feel safe and secure. If you encourage them and point out their strengths you give them a sense of control and status. If you share secrets and have private jokes you meet their need for intimacy. Think about what you offer people and what others offer you. Basic emotional needs will always play a part.

Delivering difficult messages well

What about when you need to 'have a word' with someone over something you're not happy about?

A common mistake is to criticize someone as a person rather than complain about something specific in their behavior.

What's the difference? Well if you feel strongly about something you want to let the offending person know about it. Fair enough. But if people feel attacked something has gone wrong. You want their behavior to change in the future. This is the desired outcome. You don't want a new best enemy!

How to 'attack' someone

Have you ever noticed that when giving negative feedback some people just go onto 'transmit?' The recipient becomes someone to be acted upon rather than interacted with.

Sweeping remarks about a person being 'lazy', stupid etc tend not to be forgotten even after later apologies, back tracks and claims of 'I didn't mean it - I was angry!'

If you attack someone's identity as a person (rather than something specific in their behavior) don't be surprised if they go on the defensive. If you have a problem with someone about something they've done (or forgotten to do) you can be firm but fair.

Make friends, keep friends

To hold onto the friends you have, keep the way open for good future relations with this person by avoiding causing undue offence. Once you have taken the time to make friends, you don't want to accidentally drive them away!

Constructive Criticism

Sometimes we have to deliver 'constructive criticism' – that is, letting someone know about something they do that you don't agree with. Constructive criticism is NOT however...

- Not letting them speak
- Over-generalising the problem
- Blaming them, attacking their core identity rather than focusing on the behaviour in question
- Indicating that everything they always do is wrong
- Raising your voice
- Invading body space
- Asking questions without waiting for a response: 'Why do you always...?', 'What do you think you are doing?', 'Why do you never....?'

Consequences include:

- Loss of respect, morale, and trust
- Lack of clarity in precisely what the problem is that needs addressing
- No clear feedback as to why the problem may have occurred and what can be done about it

Remember: *'An emotional brain is not a thinking brain.'*

Giving specific negative feedback (Constructive criticism or 'complaint')

Constructive criticism can also be described as 'complaint', which in fact is a clearer way of putting it. The word criticism implies something personal, complaining is more about behaviour. Here's how to do it well...

- Have a gentle start up to your complaint. The 'you' word at the start can immediately switch people into the defensive. Rather start with phrases like: 'I've noticed recently...'
- Be specific in your feedback. Talk only about the problem with their behaviour / performance you wish to address
- Keep it time limited: 'Recently I've noticed that...', and 'I want to talk about the incident last week...' Not: 'You always/never blah blah blah (because that is all they will hear!)
- Don't make comments about their personality, appearance and don't make wild statements about how everyone else perceives them. This can be unfounded and crushing. Remember some things you say may be irreparable later on so stick to the point! Keep emotions out of it as far as possible.

Being respectful and fair doesn't mean being scared to deliver the message. It is much more skilful to deliver a difficult message well than to bulldozer someone. Learning to do this well means keeping open lines of communication and maintaining relationships, which of course is most important if you have to work with them in future or they are your romantic partner.

How to give compliments

Mark Twain said he could live two months on a good compliment. This may have been pushing it a bit but giving regular and sincere (most important) compliments cements relationships.

Note: Keeping complaints specific limits damage to relationships. Being specific with your compliments maximizes their effectiveness.

So a rule for any type of feedback to other people is: Be specific!

For example, "You are so wonderful", does not have the same power as, "The way you handled that meeting showed you have real people skills... especially when you...". Keeping your compliments specific makes them meaningful and more likely to be believed.

A compliment to a young boy such as: "You were so great today winning your race / trying your hardest / comforting your friend" is much more readily accepted and memorable than a vague, 'You are so wonderful for just being you!'

Criticism (even when constructive) is more likely to be accepted if it is tempered by regular compliments. A ratio of 5:1 compliment to complaint is a handy rule-of-thumb.

Further Relationship Skills

Like a popular bank account, people will like you if you pay good interest. Listening properly to people can meet their need for connection, status and intimacy and is a key relationship skill.

Let people know you are listening by:

1. Actually listening to them, nodding, smiling and looking in their general direction.
2. Feeding back what they say; showing them you know they actually said it. And then adding anything of your own. If you don't agree at least acknowledge they've spoken: 'I understand what you mean, however as far as I see it.....', or: 'That's a good idea... and it might be even better if...'

Ask opinions, advice or help

People feel important if you ask them what they think. This meets their need for status.

Talk to them about their concerns and interests

People will feel that you are interesting if you show interest in them. Don't compromise your own personality but be aware of this basic rapport building rule.

Offer help and do favors

People like people who are helpful. Helping people practically meets all kinds of emotional needs (you should, by now, be able to work out which ones ;-)

And smile, smile, smile

Research shows that when you smile at someone 😊 pleasure centers in their brain are stimulated. 😊 People like warmth and will come to associate you with feeling good. 😊 Smiling relaxes people and make them feel they can trust you.

Basic rules on smiling: 😊

- Don't over do it! 😊 Whoops!
- Don't smile when you are anxious, angry or giving negative feedback - it's confusing!
- Don't smile when someone else has stubbed their toe. You smiling when someone else is having a bad time gives the message that you are glad it's not you rather than you wish it wasn't them!

In summary

- Remember that everyone has similar emotional needs (including you!)
- Take these needs into account in social, work and romantic situations
- Keep complaints specific and avoid overgeneralising negatives
- Make compliments specific; give examples to make them 'real'
- Listen and talk about what is important to people. And smile and look interested.

The more you meet others' emotional needs, the more they will like you. The less you step on their emotional needs, the less offence you will cause. And if someone else offends you, check out your basic emotional needs to find out why.

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